

The minutes are the record of official business actions of a group. They may also include notes about discussion, primarily for background and reference in interpreting votes. The intention of minute keeping is to summarize the key points of a meeting, not make a verbatim report.

Common Practices

Minutes are the responsibility of the secretary to a group. Occasionally people are asked to fill in for a secretary or to take minutes for an ad hoc group. In some groups, very formal recordkeeping is necessary. Some minutes are legal documents with official votes of the congregation, while others are used only for reference at a later meeting. Some people use shorthand or a laptop computer to help them take notes faster and more easily. Others use a tape recorder as a back-up at the same time they take notes. If something is unclear in their notes, they can refer to the tapes. (Listening to the whole tape will take as long as attending the meeting, so it is used only for problem areas.)

Responsibilities

To do a good job of taking minutes, you'll have responsibilities before, during and after each meeting. You'll be responsible for most or all of the following:

- Preparing before each meeting by reading minutes of previous

meetings and papers and reports to be presented. Be familiar with the meeting agenda and the constitution and bylaws.

- Arriving at all meetings early enough to be ready to write when the meeting begins.
- Bring several pens or sharp pencils, a notebook or other materials you will need.
- Record the name of the group, the place, time and type of meeting. Indicate members present by name or note that the presiding officer indicated a quorum was present. You may want to name absent members, if that is the group's practice.
- Record when and by whom the meeting was convened. Include opening activities, such as prayer or devotions or Bible study.
- Record actions regarding minutes of previous meetings, financial reports and committee reports. List the name of each person reporting. In a small meeting, a seating chart may help you identify persons speaking. In a large group, such as a Congregational meeting, each person should identify himself or herself when speaking.
- Record all motions accurately and mark them in the text so that they can easily be located for quick reading. If motions are presented orally, ask for them to be repeated for confirmation. Include points from the discussion of the motion to clarify the action or identify points of view. You'll probably

need to jot down more of the discussion than you'll finally record. Clearly indicate the action: VOTED, TABLED, DEFEATED, or AMENDED.

- Record business items that are postponed to a specific time, or referred to a committee.
- Record assignments of individuals or committees.
- Note times of future meetings.
- Follow the appropriate format. When groups meet often and have many items of business, it may help to develop a numbering system. For example, to indicate that the vote to adopt the budget was the second vote of the third meeting in 1995 of the Board of Trustees, write in the left or right margin: **Adoption of Budget 95-3 BT 2**
- Summarize accurately and fairly all points of view; avoid unnecessary detail.
- Make sure your minutes are understandable to people who were not at the meeting.
- Transcribe the minutes immediately, while your memory is fresh.
- Keep the minutes in a notebook. File the agenda and any materials used at the meeting with the minutes. Usually you'll keep the notebook until the end of your term. At that time, the minutes will be turned over to your successor or the church office. Sometimes a duplicate is kept in the church office.

- Distribute minutes to all members or read them at the next meeting. That will depend on the type of group, timing of the next meeting and availability of duplicating facilities.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Knowledge of meeting procedures, especially **Robert's Rules of Order**.
- Capacity to take notes rapidly.
- Good command of spelling and writing.
- Ability to listen carefully.
- Ability to summarize in simple language.
- Objectivity and sensitivity.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Study documents: the proposed agenda and reports and minutes of previous meetings.
- Talk about expected actions with the chairperson before the meeting.
- Ask your group occasionally to reflect on the minutes and tell whether they are clear or have too much or too little information.
- Use shortcuts and timesavers: Number agenda items for easy reference, list members of the committee before the meeting,

- draw up a seating chart and indicate motions in your notes by circling them.
- Practice summarizing and increasing your note taking speed in situations where you are not required to take minutes.
- Learn as much as possible about the group's work.
- If no particular format for minutes has been set, look at different formats and find one that seems to suit you and your group.
- Study parliamentary procedure by attending a seminar or reading and studying **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief** by Henry M. Robert, III, et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
 - Speed in writing.
 - Practice in summarizing.
 - Parliamentary procedure.
 - Transcribing minutes quickly.
- How can you get help in your areas of need?

Issues Facing the Church

- Sometimes only women are expected to take minutes. What does this say?
- Does the person taking the minutes participate in the meeting? How can your group be sensitive to the need for you to do both?

Questions

- What ideas were new to you?
- What do you think you do best in keeping minutes?
- In which of these areas do you need the most work:
 - Developing a format for minutes